

**NATURAL RESOURCES CONSERVATION SERVICE
CONSERVATION PRACTICE STANDARD**

CONSERVATION COVER

(Acre)

CODE 327

DEFINITION

Establishing and maintaining permanent vegetative cover to protect soil and water resources.

PURPOSES

- Reduce soil erosion and sedimentation.
- Improve water quality.
- Enhance wildlife habitat.

CONDITIONS WHERE PRACTICE APPLIES

This practice applies on land to be retired from agricultural production requiring permanent protective cover, and on other lands needing permanent protective cover. This practice does not apply to plantings for forage production or to critical area plantings.

CRITERIA

General Criteria Applicable to All Purposes

Species shall be adapted to soil, range site and climate conditions.

Species planted shall be suitable for the planned purpose and site conditions. Use of invasive species shall be avoided.

Seeding rates and methods shall be adequate to accomplish the planned purpose.

Planting dates, planting methods and care in handling and planting of the seed or planting stock shall ensure that planted materials have an acceptable rate of survival. **See Plant Materials Technical Note 24.**

Only viable, high quality and adapted seed or planting stock shall be used. Use of certified seed will be encouraged.

Based on seed tags, adjust seeding rates to insure the required amount of pure live seed (PLS) is applied to the site. **See Plant Materials Technical Note 4.**

Legume seed shall be inoculated with the proper Rhizobia bacteria before planting.

Site preparation shall be sufficient for establishment and growth of selected species.

Timing and use of equipment shall be appropriate for the site and soil conditions.

Vegetative manipulation will be accomplished by mechanical, biological or chemical methods, by prescribed burning or a combination of the four. If burning is used alone or in combination with the other methods, Prescribed Burning (338), must be included as a planned practice.

All nutrients shall be applied following the nutrient management requirements in the Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG).

Additional Criteria for Enhancing Wildlife Habitat

Planting/Establishment

Grasses, forbs and legumes shall be planted in mixes to encourage maximum plant diversity.

Management/Maintenance

Methods used shall be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion.

Select species to meet the operators' long-term objectives for erosion control, seed production,

livestock feed or forage, wood production, wildlife habitat or soil improvement.

In wind erosion areas, consider a temporary cover crop to control erosion. Clip, mow or use appropriate herbicide to control cover crops so they do not produce seed.

Use nurse crops only under irrigated conditions or high annual rainfall (16 inches or greater) areas. Seeding rates for nurse crops under dryland conditions should be no more than 30 percent of the normal seeding rate used for that crop. Consider harvesting the nurse crop as hay, and manage according to moisture conservation practices and light requirements of seedlings to aid seeding establishment.

When plantings are to be irrigated, maintain adequate moisture at least in the upper six (6) inches of soil during the first four (4) weeks and then in the upper 12 inches until the end of the growing season. Seedlings may be susceptible to excessive irrigation during establishment.

Maintenance practices and activities shall not disturb cover and nesting habitat during the reproductive period for grassland wildlife species.

Maintenance measures must be adequate to control noxious weeds and other invasive species.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a "spot" basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

CONSIDERATIONS

This practice may be used to promote the conservation of wildlife species in general, including threatened and endangered species.

Where applicable, this practice may be used to conserve and stabilize archeological and historic sites.

Consider rotating management and maintenance activities (e.g. mow only one-fourth or one-third of the area each year) throughout the managed area to maximize spatial and temporal diversity.

Where wildlife management is an objective, the food and cover value of the planting can be enhanced by using a habitat evaluation procedure to aid in selecting plant species and providing or managing for other habitat requirements necessary to achieve the objective.

When appropriate, use native species when available. Consider beginning the process of re-establishing the native plant community for the site.

If a native cover (other than what was planted) establishes, and this cover meets the intended purpose and the landowner's objectives, the cover should be considered adequate.

PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS

Specifications for this practice shall be prepared for each site. They shall include, but are not limited to, recommended species, seeding rates and dates, establishment procedures and other management actions needed to insure an adequate stand.

Generally accepted planting dates for non-irrigated land are:

MLRA	Spring (before)	Fall	Dormant (after)
8	4/1	10/1*	11/15
9	5/1	8/12-9/20	11/1
10	5/15	8/25-9/20	10/20
11	4/20	9/20*	11/1
12	5/15	9/20*	11/20
13	5/15	8/25-9/20	10/20
25	5/15	8/25-9/20	10/20
28A	5/1	9/1-10/1	11/1
43A	6/1	9/1*	11/1
43B	6/1	8/15-9/10	10/10
44	6/1	9/1*	11/1
47	6/1	8/25-9/20	10/20

Seeding dates may vary from these guidelines based on local experience and conditions.

*Fall seedings on irrigated land only

Specifications shall be recorded using ID-CPA-025 specification sheet, job sheets, narrative statements in the conservation plan or other acceptable documentation.

Seeding rates on irrigated land may be increased to 150 percent of the rates specified in Plant Materials Technical Note No. 24.

Actual seeding rates applied will be within 80 – 125 percent of rate expressed in seeding specification ID-CPA-025.

For shrub and tree plantings, refer to Tree and Shrub Establishment Standard (612) and Plant Materials Technical Notes No. 24, 32, 41 and 43.

OPERATION AND MAINTENANCE

Stands not grazed or disturbed over long periods may become decadent, low in vigor and accumulate excess residue, resulting in poor stand health and may need periodic treatment such as light tillage, mowing, prescribed fire or grazing.

Maintenance practices and activities should not disturb cover during the primary nesting period for grassland species.

Exceptions should be considered for periodic burning, mowing and light tillage when necessary to maintain the health of the plant community. Mowing may be needed during the establishment period to reduce competition from annual weeds. Noxious weeds will be controlled to prevent proliferation and spreading to adjacent fields.

Any use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals shall not compromise the stand or intended purpose of the planting.

Methods of weed control used shall be designed to protect the soil resource from erosion.

To benefit insect food sources for grassland nesting birds, spraying or other control of noxious weeds shall be done on a “spot” basis to protect forbs and legumes that benefit native pollinators and other wildlife.

Pest (weeds, grasshoppers, rabbits, rodents, etc.) control will be undertaken when pests are determined to be detrimental to establishment and maintenance of stands. Any control specified shall be in accordance with the Pest Management standard (595).

REFERENCES

NRCS – Idaho Plant Materials Technical Notes

No. 4 – Reading Seed Packaging Labels and Calculating Seed Mixtures

No. 10 – Pasture and Range Seedings

No. 24 – Grass, Grass-Like, Forb, Legume and Woody Species for the Intermountain West

No. 32 – Native Shrubs and trees for Riparian Areas

No. 41 – Restoration and Diversification of Plant Communities with Woody Plants

No. 43 – Tree Planting Care and Management

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